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Narrator John M. Leddy Address 1619 Brookside Road
McLean, Virginia 22101

Biographical information: Asst. Secy. of State for Europe
b. Chicago, Ill., 6/29/14; Educ: Georgetown Univ, B.S. For. Serv, 41.
Polit. & Govt. Pos: Asst. secy. of state for Europe, 65--; U.S. Ambassador
to Orgn. for Coop. and Develop. Paris, 62-65; asst. secy. of the Treas. for
Int. Affairs, 61-62; spec. asst. to Undersecy. of State, 57-61; econ, financial
and soc. policy adviser for State Dept, 41-57; Pan Am. Union, 37-41.

Interviewer Paige E. Mulhollan

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN LEDDY

INTERVIEWER: PAIGE MULHOLLAN

March 12, 1969

M: Perhaps the best way to begin is by identifying you. You are John Leddy and your position at the end of the Johnson Administration was Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. Prior to that, in the immediate past, you had served as Ambassador to OECD and then prior to that in the Kennedy Administration, both as Director for the United States and the World Bank for a short time--

L: Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, that basic title. That job also carried with it the executive directorship of the World Bank and the International Development Association and so forth. Since then it's been changed.

M: That's why I was confused. I knew that now those weren't the same jobs--but they were then?

L: They are now separate jobs, but they were the same at that time.

M: I talked to the International Monetary Fund counterpart, and I knew that was different.

L: Yes, that's different. That's always been a separate--

M: Did you ever know Mr. Johnson at all prior to the time he was President?

L: No. I did not know him before he became President.

M: You're credited, I believe, with having done a considerable amount of work while you were Assistant Secretary of the Treasury on the outline of what became the Alliance for Progress.

L: That's correct.

M: Did Mr. Johnson ever get involved in that at all?

L: Not to my knowledge. I worked there with Dick Goodwin and others in the White House and of course, with the Secretary of the Treasury, Douglas Dillon, with whom I had been acquainted before. He was the representative of the United States at the meeting at Punta del Este in August '61, where the Alliance was put forward.

M: It's sometimes been claimed that Mr. Johnson had something of a special interest in Latin American affairs. What you say doesn't indicate--

L: I do not recall his connection with the Alliance for Progress. The President, himself, of course was directly involved in it. Among his advisers I would say Dick Goodwin had as much to do with it as anybody else.

M: And you went to take the position as Ambassador to OECD in 1963?

L: Well, yes, toward the end of '62, actually.

M: So you were there a full year before President Kennedy was assassinated.

L: That's right.

M: Therefore serving through that transition. Was there a notable change of policy in regard to what you were doing there between the Kennedy and Johnson years?

L: No, I would not say so, I didn't detect a visible change in our policies there. A lot of the problems of course that we had been concerned with-- the balance of payments and that sort of thing--didn't change in their basic nature. The policies of the Johnson Administration, as I recall, were a continuation, I would more or less look at it, of the Kennedy-Johnson Administration. I didn't see any sharp change.

M: Did you begin to have any personal contact with the President in that position?

L: No, I had no personal contact with the President until I was appointed Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. I met him really for the first time at that time. This was in--I believe it was April or May of 1965, when I was asked to come to Washington and meet with him and John Macy, and thereafter he said, "All right, you're on board now, so go to work."

M: Did he give you any kind of special instructions or special charge when he gave you that position?

L: Not particularly. He just said he wanted to see me and see that I was on board. He was about to make a speech, I believe, on Europe and told me to go on down and take a look at it. Well, there were several people working on the thing downstairs, Mac Bundy--and Dick Goodwin was still there. I took a look at it and made one or two suggestions and went on back to Paris, packed up my bag to get ready to come. But that's the way it was.

M: Pretty much out of the blue, surprise-type promotion?

L: Yes. This had never occurred to me, but I got a call from the department on whether this was something I would be interested in. Since I had been wanting to leave Paris, come back to Washington for some time, and this job I had always regarded as being one of the most interesting--I still do--most interesting jobs in the State department. So I took it.

M: One of the early issues I'm sure you faced when you came back in on which I particularly wanted to get your impressions, because you represent a lot of continuity in this one, is the whole business of the MLF, which has probably been more reported and misreported than anything.

L: I wish somebody would do a careful study of the MLF. The MLF was still barely alive when I took my job here. I think I was sworn in in May of 1965, but it was clearly on the skids then. There was a lot of public opinion against it. The groundwork had not really been laid either with

Congress or public opinion. There was a confused view as to what the foreign countries thought of it, even the ones that were mostly in favor.

For example, the Germans--it wasn't always clear as to just where which part of the German government stood. The British, of course, were opposed to it. But as time went on it became clear that this proposal simply wouldn't fly and the President finally decided that he would have to put it to bed. I believe that he did along about December of 1965, if I'm not mistaken.

M: That was when Chancellor Erhard was here at that time. I think that was about the last it surfaced in the press.

L: Yes, I think that's right. The Chancellor was here also in 1966--Chancellor Erhard was, I recall.

M: That's one of the issues on which there was a fairly bitter internecine bureaucratic fight.

L: Well, you see the Disarmament Agency had always been opposed to this because they felt that setting up a nuclear grouping in the West would make it impossible, or difficult, to negotiate a nonproliferation treaty with the Soviets. The Defense department--at one time I believe McNamara was in favor of the MLF as being a way you could satisfy the desires of Germany, for example, to be a part of a nuclear grouping; but without proliferating by letting Germany have a national nuclear weapon. But I believe also the Navy was rather interested in the MLF because it would involve an expansion of the Navy and would provide a new type of naval nuclear weapons system in addition to the Polaris, because the MLF would have been a surface fleet. And I think Mac Bundy was in favor of it at one stage, but he apparently changed his mind and decided that this just wasn't going to go and he turned against it. McNamara turned against it,

and along about the end of 1965--I think it was '65--it was more or less put to bed.

M: You weren't ever publicly associated with it or the others?

L: No, because all of that went forward--you see, I found it lying around when I got to Washington. I think it had been under development back in '62 and '63 and '64 and so forth and so on.

M: What happens to bureaucrats who push an idea like that so hard and lose? What happened to the theologians? Did the President take some kind of action against them later?

L: No, one of the fellows who had been connected with it was my deputy, Bob Schaetzel. Bob then became ambassador to the European communities. Henry Owen was also associated with it and later on when Walt Rostow left he became chairman of the Policy Planning Council. I don't know how close Walt Rostow was to this, but I have the feeling that he was not one of the--didn't this idea get started in the late Eisenhower period?

M: Yes, apparently--

L: Jerry Smith.

M: Jerry Smith was very closely connected with it.

L: And Bob Schaetzel and others.

M: Robert Bowie.

L: I'd always hoped that the SP would write a history of this thing because it was a rather constructive idea, but it was poorly handled in terms of congressional aspects and public relations and whatnot. Bob Schaetzel told me at one time that on the one hand Kennedy supported the idea of having Livie Merchant (Amb. Livingston Merchant) go out and try to see whether this thing was negotiable. On the other hand, according to Schaetzel, Kennedy would not let people go up on the Hill and try to

explain what they were doing.

M: Where many of its opponents turned out to be.

L: Oh, exactly. And there was a lot of misunderstanding about it, a lot of slogans and catch words like "letting the Germans have the finger on the nuclear trigger." Well, you know this kind of pejorative talk, it's inaccurate but I don't know too much about the early history of it.

M: Is there a connection between the death of MLF and the nonproliferation negotiations? Was it in any way a quid pro quo for the NPT Treaty?

L: I don't think so because, you know, about the time that it died we came forward, the U.S. did, in NATO, with a proposal for the nuclear planning group. This was an idea of McNamara's, and I remember it very well because the very day I showed up for work there was a meeting in the Secretary's office on this notion of setting up a nuclear planning group in NATO. Schaetzel was worried about this because he said, "If we put up a nuclear planning group the Europeans will say we're just doing that as a substitute for the MLF." McNamara said, "No," he didn't think so, this was a totally different idea because what he wanted to do was to get the top people, Cabinet level people, and in effect educate them on the nature of the nuclear weapon which you couldn't do through an MLF, which is really an operating system. He was after a policy thing.

So Schaetzel's concerns were laid to rest and we went ahead with this NPG, nuclear planning group. Now that functioned in '65 and in '66 and in '67. I think that the prospect of negotiating a nonproliferation treaty became clear only in December 1966 as a result of further talks with the Soviets. But the Secretary made it clear throughout these talks with the Soviets that we would not agree to any treaty that was going to prevent the political unity of Europe or which would affect NATO nuclear operations, or, indeed, which would prevent an MLF type of arrangement--so long as this was not

transferring into national hands. So all of that was made clear to them and about December '66--

M: When you say clear to them, clear to--

L: The Soviets.

M: The Soviets?

L: Yes. And it was in that month I think, December '66, that they finally worked out what finally became the first two clauses--what they called the mirror image clauses of the NPT--and it appeared that the Soviets would support that and that we would support it and therefore it was really possible to start the negotiations. From then on out, from about that period of time, we had intensive consultations in NATO on this NPT that lasted for a year. In fact, it's still going on to some extent even though the treaty has now jelled.

M: This was primarily over the inspections article--

L: Oh, there were a lot of problems. There were a lot of problems, fear on the part of the Germans and others that the treaty would prevent a United States of Europe inheriting the nuclear weapons or the component parts. A lot of these things were explained by means of interpretations which we put into the record of the Senate. The inspection was one of them. That's still a difficult problem because of the bilateral negotiations between them--International Atomic Energy Agency on the one hand and the Euratom-Common Market thing on the other.

M: The final result does not preclude an MLF-type system sometime in the future apparently.

L: No, no it would not. As far as I can understand the treaty it would not.

M: On NATO and negotiations there, is it possible to generalize on a Johnson viewpoint regarding NATO? Did you talk to him personally about what he

thought NATO should be doing now and in the future?

- L: We've had a number of meetings with the President on NATO in the NSC. The most recent one that I recall was right after Czechoslovakia. The question came up as to whether or not NATO should have a special ministerial meeting right away on Czechoslovakia. We had a session over in the Cabinet Room. Clifford, who was the Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, said he thought even if the ministerial meeting didn't accomplish anything it would be a good thing to have it, even though no steps were taken to do anything. And the President very strongly disagreed with this. He said, "I don't see any point in our having a ministerial meeting that doesn't do anything, that doesn't come up with anything. We've been complaining about the Europeans not doing enough, any why don't we press them and really do something now? Get Dean Rusk's ambassadors out there to go in--
- L: "Get those fellows over there and see whether they're going to do something, and if they're going to do something, then we can have a meeting." That's exactly what we did! We went around the circuit and said, "Now look, let's have a ministerial meeting provided that you fellows are going to be able to come up with some commitments and understandings that you are going to increase your contributions to NATO, your military contributions." It was sufficiently good so that we did hold the meeting in November.

But the President was always a strong supporter of NATO. I never found any temptation on his part to waver about that. He was faced with some pretty difficult problems with the pressure from the Hill to cut back on our Armed Forces in Europe, and difficulties in getting the Germans to do as much as we wanted them to do to offset our military expenditures. We had some pretty rough times with them, especially the last meeting the President had with Erhard--I think it was in 1966. The President sort of

turned loose Joe Fowler and Bob McNamara on Mr. Erhard. They were pretty rough on him and we didn't reach agreement. After that, Erhard went home and, of course, he lost his job over there to Kiesinger. They still claim the failure of that negotiation had something to do with it. Well, it may have affected the timing somewhat but for those of us who'd been looking at Germany, it was pretty clear that Erhard was on the way out anyhow. It was a matter of months or something like this, and this may have just given a little extra shove.

M: The press said--

L: But to get back to the President, he certainly was always a strong supporter of NATO, no wavering whatsoever, full support for the Atlantic Alliance.

M: There was some talk of a division in the department regarding what should be the treatment of de Gaulle after--

L: Oh, well I can tell you all about that because I was there.

M: You were there, meaning--

L: No, no, I was here in Washington. I was there in the White House meeting with the President. This happened in March of 1966. General de Gaulle had sent his handwritten message. You know, it was in his own handwriting. You could just see him there writing with a quill pen or something.

M: With green eye shades.

L: To the President. He wrote one to Erhard and I guess he wrote one to Wilson and so forth. Anyhow, this was the letter that in effect told us to get out, get out of France. He was getting rid of NATO in France, the NATO thing, and he wanted our forces out--which incidentally happened to be a violation of some bilateral agreements we had with the French, but that didn't bother the General. So he sent this letter.

The question came as to how the President was going to answer it. What was he going to do? I remember that Dean Rusk and George Ball brought

Dean Acheson back into the picture. We gave him an office and so forth and went over several different drafts of what the President might--the kind of letter he would send. Acheson and the advisers prepared this draft and then we met with the President. I think there was Dean Rusk, Dean Acheson, I believe Walt Rostow was there, Chip Bohlen was there, I was there, George Ball was there.

M: Real first team.

L: Here we are. "Mr. President, here's this letter we think you ought to send to General de Gaulle," and it was a pretty rough letter and in addition a statement that he would make public. The idea of the letter was in effect--I may be overstating this a little bit--to do battle with the General in the public domain. In other words, to argue with him and appeal to the public, in effect.

M: The French public as well--

L: Well, European public, French public as well. In other words to pick up the developments so to speak and have a big public debate about it. Not that we were recommending that we propose that we stay there. This wasn't it, but it was a question of how should we handle this General in terms of public relation.

This was all in the Oval Room over there. We were sitting around there and the President was in his rocking chair. He sat there and listened to everybody, and everybody spoke up, and said, "yes, we ought to challenge the General's basic theories and so forth."

The President listened to all of this and said, "It looks like all you fellows have voted on this, haven't you." And he said, "I want to think about this a little bit, just want to think about it a little bit more." As a result of his thinking about this a little bit more, the

tone of that letter was very considerably changed. It was a polite letter--I have it here as a matter of fact--and he has one little sentence there right at the end, "as our old friend and ally, her place will await France whenever she decides to resume her leading role." In other words the President changed this. This was an important decision because you see what he did then was to set the policy tone of the administration in dealing with General de Gaulle, which was don't get into big arguments with him. Always be polite. Always be courteous. There's no point in arguing with him because he's not going to change his mind. He's asked us to get out of France. We'll get out of France.

M: This is a very personal decision.

L: Oh yes, this was a very personal decision, and in effect he disagreed with all of the advice he got around the table. I remember George Ball, I guess a few weeks after that, made some public speech at which he took the General on. And sure enough we had a memo from the White House shortly after that saying, "Stop it. We're just not going to have that kind of stuff." And this was true.

And I remember the President--we were sitting over there, and I guess this was a NSC meeting, about the time that would be required to get out of France, and McNamara was there and Wheeler was there, as I recall. The President said, "he wants us out by"--I've forgotten by what date--"within the year" or something like that. "We're going to get out of there. We're just going to get out of there, I don't want any delay. I don't want you fellows to do any delay. I want you to get out of there." He says, "He's asked us to get out in the snow. We'll sit out in the snow, but I don't want to hang around there. I just don't want any delays." And he's talking to Wheeler and McNamara, who are sort of thinking, "well, maybe

we can take a little more time."

M: Dragging their feet.

L: No sir, get out! And I remember him also talking--they used to have these ambassadorial luncheons. Usually the fellows who were hosts were Jack Valenti and Hand, when he was Chief of Protocol. They would have a few ambassadors in. Well, the whole point of it was so that the President really could drop by. He wouldn't be tied up, but usually he would drop by and spend a half-hour doing a lot of talking and whatnot. I remember on one occasion the French Ambassador wasn't there, but a lot of others were. They started talking about Old General de Gaulle, "Well, when that old man talks I just tip my hat to him, tip my hat. When he comes rushing down like the locomotive on the track, why, the Germans and ourselves, we just stand aside and let him go on by, then we're back together again." This sort of thing.

So he knew very well how he wanted to handle the General. He wasn't going to get into any arguments with him because he didn't feel it did any good. He was always in public very courteous and very pleasant in dealing with the French and General de Gaulle personally.

M: How well was that decision carried out at the very low ranks? There was a lot of press talk about private bad-mouthing of de Gaulle by the American Embassy officials and this type of thing. Did that get to be a problem?

L: No, I don't think it ever became a problem after--George Ball, of course. He was such a prominent figure, and when he would make a speech, that was different. But what people said privately I don't think mattered that much.

M: After the withdrawal from France the major publicity connected with NATO for a while at least involved what was ultimately called the Harmel

exercise. Did Mr. Johnson get involved in any of that consideration of future roles for NATO at all?

L: Yes he did, in the sense that he would review the policies, not in a formal way like they seem to be doing in the NSC now, but rather having an important policy issue discussed in the NSC. When NATO's question would come up we would prepare a basic background paper on it and submit it to the President and circulate it and then he would generate a discussion. The Harmel proposal actually reflected one of the important Johnson speeches, the one of October 7, I think it is, 1966.

M: Your memory is remarkable.

L: In which he set forth what you might call the twin pillar theory, that we maintain the deterrent of the West and the military strength of the West, but we also attempt to engage peacefully in dealings with the East. In other words, this became known as the two pillars, the deterrent and the detente. And what the Harmel exercise did really was to try to make that a sort of a NATO-wide policy, an explicit policy. It followed very closely the Johnson concepts. The Harmel exercise and the Johnson speech of October 7, were just right in order, right in line.

But the Harmel thing went forward and finally the last NATO action touching on the Harmel study really was in June of '68 in Reykjavik, where we adopted a resolution suggesting to the Russians the wisdom of engaging in mutual force reductions. That was one of the important elements in the Harmel exercise. Of course, we had the invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 20, and the atmosphere was kind of different then.

M: What about some of the conclusions of that Harmel exercise such as that NATO should consider problems that arose outside of Europe? Is that really something that NATO's apt to be doing?

- L: Well, this problem really comes up--this was one of the exercises, one of the areas to be studied in NATO. But there is very little accomplishment. The NATO countries feel that they operate within a well-defined treaty area. For example, it doesn't extend into North Africa. That's right across the Mediterranean. We have always felt that the European NATO countries should take a larger look at the world, including the question of security in the Far East. I remember Rusk used to ask them, "the question is not whether you support the United States in Viet Nam, the question is what kind of world out there would be in your own security interest; that's all I want you to do, is to think about that!" But the Europeans never really wanted to get too deeply involved outside of their own NATO treaty area. Therefore that part of the Harmel exercise never really bore too much fruit.
- M: On the other hand however, they apparently want us to consult with them about what we're going to do about it in advance.
- L: I think what they're mainly interested--when they talk about consultation, what's on their minds is that they don't want us to go around making agreements with the Soviet Union which affect them without their participation. This is the major problem about this question of consultation. And especially if we're going to engage in missile talks with the Soviets, they want to be consulted at all stages of the missile talks, to know exactly what it is we're agreeing to.
- M: Have we generally--
- L: There is a general tendency on the part of many of these countries, which after all are relatively small countries individually, in comparison with the two super-powers, a tendency to fear that there may be some effort at what they call a condominium. That is to say, the U.S. and the Soviets

will get together and try to settle these things, an imposed solution, which I think is understandable on their part but it's not very realistic. I just can't see the U.S. operating this way. It's just totally foreign to our methods.

M: Was the Johnson Administration fairly careful to notify the European allies of steps we were going to take that weren't strictly the European field? For example, on Viet Nam, did we tell them what we were going to do in Viet Nam, usually?

L: Well, we had a number of meetings of the NATO Council specifically devoted to Viet Nam, and really called for by us. George Ball used to try to intensify the consultative aspects by periodically arranging for people to come from capitals--the minister, or at least an undersecretary or someone like that, in which we would make a general report on what we were doing. But that's a different thing than consulting with a view to getting consent as to specific actions.

Now I would say that except for the very, very beginning, the very first week or two weeks in dealing with the Soviets on the Non-Proliferation Treaty--this is that December 1966--we did not handle that consultation with NATO too well. When we opened the whole thing up to consultation, we were more or less saying, "We and the Soviets are in effect agreed on this thing; we don't know how we could change it; and we know they won't agree." The NATO countries didn't like that. But apart from that very first--the very first two clauses, on all of the rest of the negotiations, on all the other clauses, in detail we consulted NATO like mad, as well as bilaterally with the Germans, So they have no complaint for almost all of the negotiating period of 1967. They did have a complaint on that very first week or so when the Secretary was working with Gromyko and others on the text of this thing.

M: The press at least alleged that the Europeans were totally surprised by McNamara's announcement of the ABM system in September of 1967. Did they react badly to this as well?

L: To the ABM thing?

M: When McNamara's speech was in San Francisco--

L: That's right, and there was not adequate consultation on that speech and I think McNamara felt that in the circumstances it couldn't be done. I remember we argued with him about that and he just said, "Well, I couldn't do anything more than inform them a few hours in advance. I can't consult them as to whether we're going to announce going ahead or not. The President has decided that that's what we're going to have to do.

Now they had talked about ABM systems in NATO, and he had indicated to the NATO countries that the U.S. was going to have to make a decision on this fairly soon. He had gone over a lot of pros and cons on this thing in general, but we didn't come and say, "Well, we're going to decide to go ahead with this tomorrow, now what do you think?" That would have been foolish anyhow, because the whole thing had been plowed through. We did know that the Europeans didn't much care for this, that in the first place they were pretty well convinced that they couldn't have an ABM system themselves, and I think they tended to fear that maybe if we get an effective ABM system that we will then be much less likely to come to their defense with nuclear weapons, you see.

But at any rate, afterwards, I think McNamara gave as good an explanation of this thing as he probably could in that speech of his on September 19. But there are still a few little inconsistencies in it, I think.

- M: You mentioned Czechoslovakia a few times. That's a crisis that at least lingers on, but there was a time period in which it was almost total concern. How actively does the President participate in something like that when there's a sudden crisis of great importance that lasts for a period of time?
- L: In that particular thing the President was kept fully informed at all times as to what was going on, partly by the Secretary personally at these Tuesday luncheons. We would get reading material up for him every night. And of course he was directly involved in it personally himself. He was over there with Dobrynin the night of the invasion, you know. Dobrynin came in with this note.
- M: Telling him that was what was going on.
- L: Yes. He also came just about the same time that the Soviets had agreed to this meeting. Actually the announcement of that was scheduled for the morning of August 21.
- M: The next day.
- L: The next day. I was asked to call Dobrynin the late afternoon of the 20th to find out whether he had yet gotten clearance of the text of the press release. This was just a textual matter. And he said, "No, I haven't gotten it yet."

And I said, "Well, I'm going to be back down here tonight at 10 o'clock, and just any time you catch me get hold of me and let me know when you get the word that this announcement can be made tomorrow morning at 10. This is what we propose." The next thing I knew I was down there at 8 o'clock because I saw the Secretary on television and saw what had happened so I jumped in the car and came down here. The funniest thing about this--of course, this was all thrown into the wastebasket--the next

morning, at ten minutes of 9 o'clock, August 21, Dobrynin called me to say that the clearance had been received about the text of this release. But he said, "I understood from the Secretary last night that we don't plan to go ahead with it today, do we?"

I said, "You understand it absolutely clearly and you'd better make it clear back in Moscow."

M: Did the Russians really think that we might go through with it at that point, I wonder?

L: As far as I know the first time that the reply of the Russians to go ahead with this thing was given to us, a Monday night--I don't have the book here--

M: That can be checked--a couple of weeks prior to the--

L: No, it was the Monday before the invasion.

M: Monday before the 20th then, Monday before the 20th of August.

L: That's right. It was the Monday before the 20th of August, because the Secretary had a dinner on board one of the President's vessels, the Honey Fitz, I think it was. Not the Sequoia, it was the Honey Fitz. The Secretary had a dinner, and my wife and I were invited. We went down there and Dobrynin and Mrs. Dobrynin came there and the Secretary and Dobrynin were very briefly together, very briefly. The rest of the evening was very informal, no business, a number of other people around. As we were coming into dock about 10 o'clock the Secretary took me aside and told me that Dobrynin had agreed to have this summit meeting, and the agreement had been reached in the Soviet Union. So he asked me to think about what we should do about informing some of the other countries. I went back to the office and called the Secretary up and told him I thought we'd better get word out to NATO at the foreign minister level very soon. Then we were working on how to handle

it so that the timing was such that it wouldn't leak. The date, time was set for the morning of August 21st, thrown into a cocked hat by this Soviet invasion.

M: And the Russians have never explained what their--

L: The Secretary later told Dobrynin that this was just like throwing a dead fish in the face of the President. Of course, Dobrynin tried to explain there really was no connection--

M: Compartments, one over here and one over here, no connection. Did the Czechoslovakian thing make any permanent changes in our status in Europe or our stance in Europe? Did it shift any balances importantly for the long run?

L: I don't know. I think certainly it tended to get the Europeans to pull their socks up a little bit more, but how long this is going to last I don't know. We will undoubtedly have some actions that they're going to take to improve the quality of their armed forces and that sort of thing. But how soon the public will forget Czechoslovakia, I don't know. I think the Soviets are going to have to be in Czechoslovakia for a long time to come. Having invested pretty heavily there they're not going to let the Czechs return to the liberalization movement of last January. They're going to have to keep their forces there. This may keep the thing alive somehow. But they certainly would like to have everybody forget.

M: Sure.

L: That's one reason they've got their tongues hanging out now trying to get a summit meeting, you see.

M: Everybody always claims that the chief European problem is with Germany. Did the Johnson Administration put any pressure on for any kind of a short term movement toward settlement of the general German problem?

L: No, no. Why would we do that?

M: Well, that's the point. We would not do that, you mean?

L: No, we have supported the objectives of the West Germans in their desire to reunify the country under their freedom. We've always done that.

M: But we haven't pushed for any motion--

L: Well, the problem isn't with the West Germans. It's with the Soviets and the East Germans. They're the ones who want to keep it a divided country and to keep the Communists in power in East Germany. But there's nothing that we can do, or the West Germans can do, to overcome that.

M: The West Germans undertook, at least at one point, what looked to be kind of a campaign to build their own bridges to east Europe.

L: Well, we supported that too.

M: We encouraged that?

L: Yes, because that is also a part of the--go back to that speech of October 7, '66 of the President--this business of bridge-building and peaceful engagement and so forth. This is something we welcomed on the part of the West Germans because we think this is the right--we don't see any hope more than they do of reunifying Germany today. But the only way you get to a point they might is by changing the whole atmosphere, but this is a long, long-term kind of thing.

M: What about recognition of the new boundary line, of giving up of--

L: You mean the Oder-Neisse thing? That isn't terribly important. The Germans have no intention of trying to change that border, but they say that the border can only be settled when there is a peace treaty. What they want is a reunified country. Therefore they don't like to give up this Oder-Neisse because they think it may be a bargaining business. Well, we don't think it is a bargaining bit for the Germans in dealing with the Poles or anybody else, but

we've never urged them to change their minds about it or do anything different because it's a domestic, political problem for them.

M: You mentioned that we had to push them pretty hard on the offset purchase.

L: Oh, that's a different thing because we are in balance of payments difficulties, and we've been spending somewhere around eight or nine hundred million dollars a year. Our forces in Germany have spent this much in marks and they have to pay out dollars for their purchases. Therefore these have gone into the German reserves. We've been looking, trying to find ways in which we can offset the bad effect of that on our own balance of payments. This is what that issue has all been about.

M: Did Mr. Johnson get involved in those pressures at all?

L: Yes, he did. He was very strong in pressing the Germans to beef up their military purchases from us to try to offset these expenditures. He didn't himself get into any kind of detail, but he was aware of what we were trying to do and supported the negotiators so that he felt that he had to do something there. He told Erhard and others that, "well, somehow I can take care of this if I can get an agreement so we can work this thing out, so I can explain it to the Congress, but if I don't get any agreement, it's going to be very difficult for me." He never threatened to take forces out but he made clear that it would be very helpful to him in keeping the armed forces there, if we could get some agreement on this neutralization, which we did. But now the negotiation is up again.

M: The press indicated there was some coolness initially, personally, between Mr. Johnson and Mr. [Kurt Georg] Kiesinger in Kiesinger's early days as Chancellor [of West Germany]. Was there anything to that as far as you could tell?

L: You mean before they met? Well, I think the problem there really was Kiesinger is a man who is sort of given to philosophizing out loud. He

used to do an awful lot of this philosophizing out loud after he was made Chancellor and before he'd come over to meet the President. I must say he said some rather peculiar things. He didn't say anything about the President per se, but he sort of talked about, as I recall at one point, nuclear complicity. Well, this kind of remark, about us and the Soviets--our nuclear duplicity or complicity--he may have said either one or both at different times. Now I never heard the President say any word about Kiesinger but there may have been some wonderment in his mind about what kind of a fellow this was. But when he came over here Kiesinger felt that he had a very successful visit over here, and he was very much pleased with it.

M: That sort of anticipates part of what I was driving toward here. Did you get a lot of chances to see Mr. Johnson as a personal diplomat with Erhard and Kiesinger and others?

L: Some, yes, but on some occasions they would just go off sort of and meet alone with maybe an interpreter or something like that. On numbers of occasions even the Secretary wouldn't go in.

For example, I remember when Wilson was over here. It was the week before the outbreak of the June 5 war, which I think was a Sunday, wasn't it?

M: Yes.

L: And Wilson and his advisers were over in the White House. The President took Wilson away and left all of the rest of us, including the Secretary and McNamara and so forth, to sit with, I guess it was Sir Bert Trend who had come along, and the British Ambassador (Sir Patrick Dean). So when he did that you didn't get much of a chance. But I remember when Kiesinger was here, I think they met together and then they came out and joined the rest of us in the

Cabinet. I think the President then called on Kiesinger to report everything they had covered, and it was a pretty good report. So he used that techniques

I think that he was a very effective personal diplomat when he put his mind to it. When he wanted to really persuade somebody he was very effective. Of course he's a formidable man.

M: Physically and--

L: Well, just forceful, really.

M: And the Europeans responded pretty well to this. There's no style trouble?

L: None at all that I can recall.

M: That's sometimes been reported the other way I think, and, as you say, probably wrongly.

You mentioned also in passing Mr. Johnson's policy of the United States building bridges to the East. Do you think there were real accomplishments of the Johnson Administration in this?

L: Well, unhappily, I don't think we were able to get very far in anything. We had that piece of legislation they wanted to get through which would help to grant the most-favored-nation treatment to a number of the countries there that don't get it now. We discriminate against the Soviet Union; we discriminate against Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria.

M: Everybody but Poland and Yugoslavia--

L: Everybody but Poland and Yugoslavia, and the only way you can get trade moving is if we can do that. Well, the Congress of course never would grant the authority. Now there have been some things with the Soviets which have gone ahead. The cultural exchanges were continued. I remember I negotiated those in 1966 with Romanovski. The President took a very close personal interest in that, unhappily.

M: Unhappily?

L: Yes. He bawled me out because of a problem we had there. I'll explain it if you're interested. It's not terribly important. But, anyhow, we continued the exchanges and finally got a civil air agreement with the Soviets, got a Consular convention. Now these are very modest things, but you have to begin with a very unnatural situation between us and the Soviets with almost no real contacts at all.

M: But he did get involved in it to the extent of coming to you personally--?

L: Well, it wasn't exactly that way. He was very offended with the Soviets because they postponed the showing of "Hello, Dolly". Mary Martin was the star and the postponement had the effect of cancelling it because it costs money to keep a show on the road. So therefore the whole thing had to be called off. Well, he wanted to be sure in this negotiation that we had absolute reciprocity, and if there was going to be any hanky-panky on their side, or they started postponing or terminating any agreed show like this, we were going to have reciprocity on it. "We'll just cut off their water." We'll do the same thing, you see.

Well, I had heard that the President was very much interested in this through Francis Bator. So I was very careful. We sent him over a memo in advance explaining just what we were going to do and how it was all going to work out. I spent three weeks, with this fellow Romanovski making absolutely clear this reciprocity thing that the President wanted. We got language in there--I think the word was "correspondingly"--so it's going one-by-one. We have to be sure that ours is getting in or we won't let theirs in. Well, after a lot of stone-walling the Soviets finally gave up and decided they'd sign the agreement and we closed it up on a Sunday.

Well, here's where I made a mistake! We're all down here on Sunday and decided that it would take about two days to get the papers worked up for signing Tuesday, so we set the signature date Tuesday. But then here I made an error because I let the boys tell the newspaper people to stand by for a signing on Tuesday. When that got out the President hit the ceiling because he hadn't seen the agreement. He hadn't seen the papers. I remember the day that we were going to sign the thing on Tuesday, and the Secretary and I were up having lunch with the Russians and we got a call from the White House right there and I had to leave the luncheon and get down and see Califano and explain the whole thing.

M: That's interesting. Califano, not Rostow.

L: No, he turned the whole thing over to Califano to be sure that this agreement was in shape. He was worried about this reciprocity. So I got our lawyers to prepare a memo that finally persuaded him that it was okay, which it was. But I think what really burned him was this business of letting the newspaper people know there was going to be a signature before I had finally gotten his approval.

M: It wasn't the policy but the publicity--

L: This is what I think really burned him up, the assumption that we were going to sign the bill, but all we were trying to do was to set up the administrative arrangements. We knew the President had to approve it before he would sign it, but we never should have told this to the press, you see, because that just assumes that there's going to be a signature.

M: That's the kind of thing--

L: At any rate, boy, was he mad! I remember the Secretary turning back there, and the President got the Secretary and he got me and Francis Bator and all this in one--there's some little study over there, I don't

know where it is, just a tiny room. He said, "Do I have to call the Secretary of State personally to get something done the way I want it done?" So I said I was sorry, and apologized to the President. I didn't mean to presume that he would sign this without his authority and we shouldn't have notified the press and so forth. Well, he was really mad, he was really mad.

M: Well, he wasn't getting along too well with the press about that time anyway, and it didn't help I'm sure.

L: Bawling Francis out as well, you see, because I was relying on Francis Bator to tell me. And later on the Secretary told me--

M: I'm going to Cambridge to see Francis Bator next week--

L: You ask him about that. He said, "Why didn't you tell me that Francis Bator had told you this thing? You should have left it to me!" I didn't know that he was all upset about this business of "Hello, Dolly".

I know what they mean now when they say that Johnson can really bawl people out. Well, it didn't last too long. He was perfectly friendly later on.

M: He didn't bear any grudges then?

L: Not to my knowledge.

M: Do you think from the President down was really committed to the building bridges thing? Did they really try very hard on the East-West Trade Bill, for example?

L: I don't know how hard they tried. They had this Miller Committee you know which came out favorably. Tony Solomon handled this thing in the State department and I think he went up there a number of times and tried to get Mills on board, but the atmosphere really was never good enough to. You see, that's a difficult thing because a lot of the people who were

opposed to it are opposed to it for protectionist reasons. They can always fan up the anti-Soviet or anti-Communist element, but what they're really concerned about is they don't want the tariffs to be reduced--on Czech glass for example, or anything else that is sensitive. So, it takes a pretty good atmosphere to be able to get a bill through, and we just never got that developed.

M: Was there a lot of division in the department on the policy as well?

L: No. I don't know of any division in the department about the policy.

M: Did the European bureau play much of a role in connection with getting the Paris talks started in 1968 on Viet Nam?

L: Not the European bureau, no.

M: So you weren't too closely involved.

L: No. This was all handled by the Secretary and the White House and EA, Bill Bundy.

M: What about the general problem of Viet Nam? It is generally presumed to have a considerable fall-out effect on European relations. Do you think that's exaggerated? Or is that accurate?

L: I think it's somewhat exaggerated by the Europeans, first and foremost. I think the reason for this--well, the argument that we're preoccupied with Viet Nam and therefore neglecting Europe, it's easy to understand that if you're a European and look at the American press for the last couple of years. This is what the American people have been preoccupied with and they haven't paid too much--why should they pay an awful lot of attention to Europe! It's more or less going along and peaceful, but this doesn't mean we've neglected the problems that we did have. I remember the President used to complain about that. He said, "We never consult? It seems to me I'm consulting all the time with somebody

over here from Europe. Their heads of government or their foreign minister, or someone comes in here all the time. Nobody ever sees this. Nobody ever knows how much attention we're giving to the problems." Well, he's right.

M: What about the Greek coup? The European bureau doesn't have Greece, do they, for some unknown reason.

L: No, because Greece and Turkey traditionally have been a part of the Middle East.

M: Right.

L: And we get involved in Greece and Turkey as a result of their membership in NATO and things that affect the NATO thing. Yes, but basically the backstopping for that is in Near Eastern Affairs. You probably didn't know that Australia and New Zealand used to be a part of the European Bureau.

M: I did--

L: Because it was a British Commonwealth, but reason finally prevailed.

M: So, sometime reason may prevail in the other case as well.

L: It would make a certain amount of sense to put Greece and Turkey in the European Bureau.

M: As long as NATO particularly is going to be the chief concern of this Bureau.

L: But I particularly wouldn't want to have Greece right now.

M: No, this would be a pretty bad time. What would you consider the major failings of the Johnson Administration in Europe? Can you pick out some that you think are particularly unfortunate?

L: I don't know that you would call this a failure of the Johnson Administration, but I think the MLF was mishandled, both internationally and domestically.

And just about the point where the Europeans were probably going to go for this thing we dropped it.

M: We sold them and then--

L: I don't know who mishandled it, but that's the way it was now. I think you would have to blame that on the Kennedy-Johnson combination plus the group that started the thing under Eisenhower. But if you want to blame an administration I suppose the big mistakes were made at the Kennedy-Johnson period in how it was handled. But I believe that it had been mishandled by the time that Johnson became President, so I don't want to blame him particularly.

M: Do you think that Johnson used the State department--?

L: I think that was bad. I also do not think we handled the offset problems with Erhard. I think the President allowed Joe Fowler and McNamara to be too stubborn, too tough, and too unyielding. I think that was a great mistake.

M: Does that include McCloy [John J.] as well?

L: No, it was after the breakdown of those negotiations that we got McCloy in. McCloy knows how to deal with Germans. He would never do such a thing.

M: He was called in to pick up the pieces, as it were?

L: Well, I think it was after that that we had these tripartite talks to deal with--McCloy came in and headed up a group that worked out this rotation plan, to reduce the scope of the problem. I was just trying to think whether there was anything else. I don't believe so.

M: Both Kennedy and Johnson were charged with sometimes going around the State department and increasing the role of the White House, letting its staff over there do things the State department should properly do. Do you think that was a serious shortcoming of either or both of them?

L: I think there is some of that. I think that there always will be. I don't know how you can avoid some problems of that sort. But I remember when Francis [Bator] was here, we worked very closely with Francis and the White House where he was working both under Mac Bundy and Walt Rostow. I don't think we could have had a better relationship so far as EUR was concerned. He was extremely helpful with us. I mean when we wanted something that only the White House could give, this was very helpful.

M: So it might work in a helpful way.

L: Oh yes, sure. I don't know to what extent this might have been a complaint that may be more true of Far Eastern problems than European, because I think even Bill Bundy probably thought that Mac Bundy was sometimes pulling some things on the side that he didn't know about.

M: You didn't find that they went to your subordinates around you, for example, sometimes and perhaps sold them a viewpoint that was a White House viewpoint rather than a bureau viewpoint?

L: That wouldn't have done them any good. No, they never tried that.

M: I don't want to limit you. Are there any areas of consideration that I haven't thought to bring up that you think are particularly important that we shouldn't leave out? I'm kind of at the mercy of what's around--

L: I think I've probably covered most of the things where I had some contact, even though not a very close one, with the President. I think we've probably covered most of the significant things. I think the President, as I say, has always been very strong on NATO, has always been strong on European unity. I've never felt that we were in any danger of having our basic policies frustrated or altered under Johnson. I think he understands them very well, has understood them, was very good on them.

M: Well, we certainly thank you for giving us so much of your time. It's a very enlightening interview. I appreciate it.

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By John M. Leddy

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